



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February 17, 2015**

HB 5782, An Act Allowing Pharmacists To Dispense Or Administer An Opioid Antagonist To Treat Or Prevent A Drug Overdose

HB 5784, An Act Concerning Pharmacists And Abuse-Deterrent Opioid Prescriptions

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 5782, An Act Allowing Pharmacists To Dispense Or Administer An Opioid Antagonist To Treat Or Prevent A Drug Overdose**, and **HB 5784, An Act Concerning Pharmacists And Abuse-Deterrent Opioid Prescriptions**. CHA supports these bills as components of a comprehensive statewide strategy to reduce the misuse and abuse of opioids and other prescription drugs in Connecticut.

Connecticut hospitals treat everyone who comes through their doors 24 hours a day, regardless of ability to pay.

Before commenting on the bill, it's important to point out that this is a time of unprecedented change in healthcare, and Connecticut hospitals are leading the charge to transform the way care is provided. They are focused on providing safe, accessible, equitable, affordable, patient-centered care for all, and they are finding innovative solutions to integrate and coordinate care to better serve their patients and communities.

Opioids are drugs that reduce pain signals to the brain. They can be a safe and effective tool to manage pain, but they may be misused or abused by people seeking their euphoric effect. Opioid abuse can lead to addiction, chronic illness, or death. Over the past four years, Emergency Departments (EDs) have seen a 50 percent increase in opioid overdoses. In 2014, there were nearly 1,900 Connecticut hospital ED visits related to opioid overdoses.

Connecticut hospitals are already engaged in efforts to reduce inappropriate opioid use. The recent development of voluntary opioid prescribing guidelines to help ED staff treat patients with chronic pain conditions is one such example. Formulated by hospital ED directors in collaboration with other prescribers and the Department of Public Health, the guidelines will

help reduce the inappropriate use of opioids while preserving the vital role of hospital EDs in treating patients with emergent medical conditions.

The development of the guidelines is part of a broader statewide strategy to reduce the impact of opioid addiction, and it demonstrates the willingness of hospitals and physicians to engage in multi-sector collaboration with the state to address this problem.

Opioid antagonists are drugs that neutralize or counteract the potentially fatal effects of an overdose. **HB 5782** will allow licensed pharmacists to dispense or administer opioid antagonists such as naloxone hydrochloride (naloxone or Narcan) to reverse the respiratory depression caused by opioid overdose. Emergency medical personnel, healthcare professionals, and patients increasingly are being trained in the use of opioid antagonists. Expanding the availability of these drugs by allowing licensed pharmacists to dispense or administer them is a safe and effective way to enlist allies in the battle against opioid abuse.

Abuse-deterrent drugs are manufactured with physical, chemical, or other barriers that make abuse more difficult or less attractive to patients. These drugs are emerging as another important tool for addressing prescription opioid abuse. **HB 5784** will prevent pharmacists from making a substitution when an abuse-deterrent opioid is prescribed, unless the pharmacist receives written permission from the prescribing healthcare provider. This measure will help ensure that a patient's care plan will be implemented, increase opportunities for long-term substance abuse recovery for patients who suffer as a result of the misuse of prescription opioids, and provide a valuable tool for healthcare providers to treat patients suffering from chronic pain, while minimizing the potential for addiction and abuse.

CHA believes that a statewide strategy to combat opioid abuse should include these measures.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.